

March 26, 1966 25

3/26/66

Dear Ed,

It was certainly enjoyable to read your letter and to hear how things are with you. It is amazing what a different impression I get from this letter when comparing it with the letter of last September. If you remember the first letter, you will recall that you were very enthused with the idea of a Christian's freedom. Anything he chooses to do is fine with God; God has not written the script beforehand. As I mentioned in my reply, I found that part of your letter a timely reminder for myself.

I was trying to decide what to do with the rest of the stay here in Cleveland, what to do after returning to the Society, and when to return to the Society.

I tried moving into a poorer neighborhood, after quitting my job, but I was slowed down through some misunderstandings. Twice I had a room all arranged for, only to arrive with my baggage and

find it gone through some unexpected confusion.

By then I was informed that I stood a good chance of being sent in June to a superb mission in Ecuador. As a result I started to study Spanish, a language I had last seen in high school.

Now I am to return to the Society on Monday and to be stationed at Nativity Parish, a Puerto-Rican parish the Jesuits have in lower Manhattan. It will give me plenty of practice in speaking Spanish as well as in working in a poor area.

As for Ecuador in June, I will have to discuss it with the Provincial but the chances seem about even that I will be going. Naturally, I have been reading up on the set-up there, and it is in a very splendid mess. After many years of effort things seem much worse now than when they started. If I don't go there, I will, I suppose, be at Nativity for the year.

Your reaction to ~~the~~ Kafka was just the opposite of my own. I liked the incomprehensibility of the court as a superb literary image of the

great gulf between the finite and the infinite. He has a way of portraying the uselessness of human effort that I find a good reflection of the teaching of Christ. If you want to get more depressed, try "The Castle and a short story "The Great Wall of China." I can still remember how much I liked them, though I read them many years ago.

He rejects all attempts at building up the city of man - he makes it plain that this goal is a waste of energy, a light beckoning to us from a swamp; if man's life makes sense, it doesn't consist in being a part of a great human accomplishment. I agree with this so I like to read him. "The Great Wall of China" is rather short and I think he is here at his best.

Also my reaction to the historical study of the New Testament was obviously different from yours. I found it a tremendous stimulus and inspiration, but I think this is more than can be handled in a letter. I have kept up my reading in the area, ~~and~~ Perhaps I reacted

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differently because before my study of it,
the Bible had never held much appeal for me.

If I do get down to Washington we
could go into that as well as your 'mystical
or intuitive certitude of Jesus' personal interest'
which is a closely related subject.

This past year has given me much time to
do a lot of thinking about those two problems
which are somewhat (?) central.

If you can get up to N.Y. don't hesitate.
I should have time. But if you can, warn me
on it. Till then.

Yours friend,

Father Sampson

6/13/66

Church of the Nativity

44 SECOND AVENUE

NEW YORK 3, N. Y.

June 13, 1966

Dear Ed,

It was nice to hear from you and to learn that everything is going reasonably well.

I hope the next letter you get from me will be written in Ecuador. Tomorrow I start going for my visa and I should leave within 3 or 4 days, a week at most. One plan involves my returning for a few weeks in September or October, so I may see you then - who knows?

Your summer work sounds tremendous. I'm not sure but I think Woodstock theologians used to work there also - but don't hold that against

the place.

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It sounds like a very nice year for your brother also. What would be the aim of your year in Germany - an M.A.? - would that be out if you decide to go into social work?

As for your bias on not being able to prove Christianity from history, or philosophy etc., would you also hold that one cannot know from history etc. that Christianity is the true faith? When a man reads history with 'perfect objectivity', will he reach no conclusion one way or the other? Will there be a more probable opinion - or are the facts themselves absolutely neutral? Is he really getting at neutral facts anyway - isn't history written by ~~un~~partial human beings?

Or do you hold that what I cannot prove, I do not know?

As for our own conscience - do you feel that we can safely presume that ~~our~~ ^{our} conscience is ~~alt-~~ always correct? If not, do you feel that we can follow it anyway whether it is misguided or not? or by following one's conscience do you ~~mean~~ include the advice of others, the experience of others, history philosophy etc. - in other words, man's best? or do you also see a need for

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a gift of light from a source over and above man's power?

As for the Spanish, I have 'graduated' and am rapidly forgetting it all. I will be studying it again in Quito when I land. I think that the purpose of the high-school course is mainly a reading Knowledge. The conversational element is thrown in for the sake of achieving this reading skill in a more pleasant way. I think a course in high-school solely aimed at speaking would be quite useless, because the skill disappears so rapidly when you don't use it.

As for going out without the Roman collar - naturally I feel like it often, but I don't need the coat. I just wear a sports shirt. So I really cannot use the coat.

If you're interested there's a fine article in the NC Reporter - a left-wing Catholic weekly from about June 1ST. It's on the inside of the back cover and it

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is written by a nun. She very carefully discusses poverty and religious and she makes some general suggestions that sound like the future of Nativity parish - if all goes well.

I'm also reading Bonhoeffer's Cost of Discipleship and I really like it. I'm sure you would, too - it's the Imitation without the monastic physical separation. I left my copy in my confessional last Saturday and someone stole it. They're going to be surprised.

Also M^cKenzie's Power and Wisdom on the personalist interpretation of the NT which I find as close to the Gospel as you can come.

Other than these - history, as usual. Acton, Council of Constance, Spain in the 16th Century, and Huxley's Grey Eminence. None of them is the perfect work - recent, Anglican, limited in time, from original sources, on a religious figure, etc. - but they all approach it enough.

Well, Ed, you'll be hearing from me again and I hope I can see you again when I return.

Your friend,

Father Sampson